

THE BISHOP OF MESSEIA AND HIS GOOD WORKS

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[346] The contrast between an ordinary priest's home and the bishop's palace in Kalamata is quite marked, for the latter was once the ornate building housing the local branch of the Bank of Greece. But the bishop's interest in the people of his diocese, both the city dwellers in Kalamata and the farmers in the surrounding villages, equaled that of any priest for his parishioners. The bishop, when visited in 1953, proved a friendly, jovial person, with an iron-gray beard, a dignified though rotund figure, and a very forward-looking social philosophy. It was this latter quality in particular that had made me seek him out after hearing from friends in Athens of his unusual achievements in the welfare field.

He began to talk about what he had done and hoped to do for his people: "I became interested when I saw their great needs, for, as a church leader, I am responsible for the welfare of whatever people are under me." But before he started on any specific projects after his arrival in this diocese, he had thought it best, as he phrased it, "to put myself at the disposal of the people." He gradually gained the confidence of the members of his diocese by making available to them for local use all of the church's funds derived from festivals. The people began to realize that this bishop was interested in them. Later on, when he began asking them to support the various projects which he started, they gladly cooperated.

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747 His first project was a day nursery, which takes care of one hundred and twenty children whose mothers are at work, started in 1947. Visiting this nursery in the afternoon when all of the children had gone home, we noted the cleanliness and the simple but adequate facilities. The success of this nursery prompted the bishop to start another one in Mycenae for one hundred children in 1948.

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[847] One perplexing problem was that of illegitimate children. In many cases the mother would kill such a child or leave it with people who exploited it unmercifully. So he started a home for these children in 1947. Since then, two hundred and fifty children have gone through the home, sixty of them have been adopted and fifty were there then. The equipment was simple and bare, but everything was spotless. When we entered, the children came up to the bishop with great pleasure, for he is a favorite with the young children. One of the nurses told us: "When we have a child that is lonesome, who won't eat, we ask the bishop to come feed the child. When he comes, the child always eats."

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[657] The bishop noticed, however, that many of the boy foundlings, but relatively few of the girl foundlings, would be adopted. The boys who were not taken by foster parents by their fifth or sixth year would go into the National Boys' Orphanage of Kalamata, largely supported by the state, which had one hundred and fifty boys in 1953. Something had to be done for the girls.

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Illegitimacy. During the 16 years of their settlement in this village no case of illegitimacy has occurred. Cases of this kind are ostracized and are looked upon as very immoral. The morals are very strict and their observance is mutual by both men and women.

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Permanence of Marriage. Under the Greek Orthodox church it is hard to get any kind of divorce. No divorce has so far occurred in the village and seldom is there any chance for divorces. Since the women are pre-occupied the year around with house work, farm work and raising children there is not much time left to think /27/ about divorces. There was one case only that had an excuse that his wife could not bear any children. Since he was the only male in the family he thought the family name would disappear without any children. This was not a good excuse for a divorce so he had to live on with his wife.

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Educational Function. The family life is the education function. Neither society or the government has much influence as the family traditions have on their children. The influence is so strong that even after marriage the son, according to the existing traditions, works for the father and carefully executes all his orders. The girls learn from their mothers embroidery work, cooking, baking, washing, weaving, spinning, and all those jobs that are expected from a grown up girl.

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The different vocations which are taught in school in many countries, are here under the guidance of the mother and entirely under family supervision.

The son learns the art of manual work in the fields from his father. When very young he follows carefully his father and by the time he is 14 years old he knows more or less the routine side of farming.

The moral training of the children rests with the grandparents. They have more influence and more experience /28/ of moulding the lives of the children.

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The grandfather with his numerous heroic stories starts to influence the life and the future of the boy. His climax ends

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